

15 March 2017

Occupied Palestinian Territory – Palestinian forces assault human rights defenders during peaceful demonstration

On 12 March 2017, human rights defenders **Munther Amira**, **Mohammed Khatib** and **Farid Al-Atrash**, along with over 18 other people, were assaulted by Palestinian forces while participating in a peaceful demonstration outside the Ramallah District Court in Palestine. The protesters were demonstrating against a case that had been brought against Palestinian activist Basel Al-Araj, who was then killed by Israeli soldiers on 6 March 2017 in his home in Ramallah.

[Munther Amira](#) is the head of the **Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC)**. The PSCC facilitates communication between, and helps to strengthen, the different popular committees in Palestinian villages who struggle against what they call the 'apartheid wall', or 'security fence', as it is known to Israelis, and suffer human rights violations under the Israeli occupation. [Mohammed Khatib](#) is a Palestinian lawyer and board member of the PSCC. [Farid Al-Atrash](#) is a Palestinian lawyer and human rights defender in Hebron. He is chairman of the Independent Commission for Human Rights in Bethlehem and a member of the PSCC.

On 12 March 2017, Palestinian security forces, including a special police unit, violently suppressed a peaceful protest outside of the Ramallah District Court. The demonstration was over a court case against Palestinian activist Basel Al-Araj, who was killed on 6 March 2017 by Israeli soldiers in his home in Ramallah, after the case was opened. According to Munther Amira, Mohammed Khatib and Farid Al-Atrash, who were all participating in the protest, there was no justification for the violent suppression of the peaceful demonstration. Protesters were standing still when a large police force approached the crowd and allegedly began beating them with wooden batons, using pepper spray and firing tear gas canisters directly at the crowd.

Munther Amira witnessed a policeman assaulting a woman, and attempted to stop him. As a result, five policemen attacked and pulled the human rights defender to the ground in an attempt to apprehend him. Munther Amira was eventually released when witnesses insisted that there were no grounds for his arrest. During the same demonstration, Mohammed Khatib convinced a police officer to ask other officers to refrain from shooting tear gas directly into the crowds of protesters. During the discussion, two men wearing plainclothes approached Mohammed Khatib, one of whom punched the human rights defender in the face. It was later discovered by the human rights defender that the two men belonged to Palestinian intelligence. Farid Al-Atrash was hospitalised after he was beaten severely by the special police unit with wooden batons on his left leg during the demonstration. The human rights defender was attempting to stop police officers from beating the father of Basel Al-Araj. Four journalists from Wattan TV, [Roya TV](#), and Palestine Today were also beaten in what appeared to be a deliberate attempt to prevent them from covering the protest.

Front Line Defenders condemns the use of force by Palestinian police units to suppress the peaceful protest and the physical assault of several human rights defenders. Front Line Defenders is further concerned at the trend of harassment against human rights defenders by Palestinian authorities solely for their legitimate work in the defence of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the use of force to suppress the peaceful protest and into the assault of Munther Amira, Mohammed Khatib, and Farid Al-Atrash, with a view to ensuring their protection, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Provide the necessary medical treatment for injured human rights defenders;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are able to practice freedom of assembly without fear of reprisals.